Letter

from.

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a great deal of ink has been lately wasted pro and con, by the gentlemen of the faculty, in the important dispute concerning the famous rabbit woman of Godalmin, some being moved to it by a certain emulation common among men in the same profession, and a secret desire they have of destroying one anothers reputations, whilst others stand up merely to assert the dignity of human nature, and to vindicate it from the affront which they pretend is put upon it by this base imposture.

But begging these gentlemens pardons, I cannot but think, their partiality has made them carry this point a little too far, for I can see no reason for treating rabbit with this extream contempt; and had the thing been really true, I am very much in doubt, whether the human species had been any ways degraded by so near a kindred with one of the most inoffensive animals in the creation; nay I am much afraid, that were the vertues and vices opatural to each, fairly stated and examined, the comparison would not turn much to our advantage or honour.

But it is said, that if the force of imagination in the female sex should be able to bring about such strange effects, who can say how far the mischief might spread for at that rate a man of fortune might be in danger of having a rabbit for his eldest son; and how odd would it look in a family, to see such a diminutive creature inherit the estate, while perhaps his younger brothers might be fellows of six foot high; nay, more, as we know that women of fashion, who live at ease, and take care of nothing, are most subject to spleen, vapours &c, and of consequence, more under the government of whim and imagination (which their husbands will testify) it is not impossible but this way of breeding might spread afterwards, that we might come at last to be governed by rabbits.

I suppose, that about the blessed age of forty one, there might have been a great many strange kinds of births; for we read in Hudibras, that preferments were bestowed

in the following manner.

A Calf, an aldermen; a goose a justice,
And rooks committee men, and trustees.

and though men might think it very hard to have geese and rooks set over them, yet I do not conceive that the same objection can with any justice be made against rabbits; for suppose a rabbit should be chosen the representative of some borough, or allowing there should be a majority of them in any assembly, yet I cannot be of opinion (tho' I am no rabbit myself) that the public would any way suffer for it.

For we have reason to think, that rabbits would act according to the laws of nature; and as by this affinity they might perhaps look upon us to be of the same species with themselves, in all probability they would use us as such. and how seldom do we meet with this treatment from men when we once put ourselves in their power.

Rabbits have but few desires and few appetites to gratify, and therefore we should have little reason to appprehend their running into luxury which some state empiricks have laid in mens way as necessary to prepare them for receiving of bribes and ruining their country. A rabbit would have no notion of maintaining a thum pet in a gilt chariot with six lazy footmen behind, much less would he think it a pleasure to fool away his nights at a masquerade, or give his vote, least he should not have as many embroidered suits, as there are birth nights in a year, nor would he take a pension to enable him to subscribe to the Italian Opera, and so sell his country for a song.

Thus much by way of digression, for our present design is to shew, that stories of this kind have often obtained belief in other countries, as well as ours, especially in Germany, where the people are for the most part, the dullest upon earth, as well as the most credulous of witchcraft, and all kind of prodigies.

I have seen a book called Historia naturalis m
Mori, written by a german physician named Jos. Bapt. of Lamzweerde wherein among many other stories, he tells one, which he says, was well known to all Holland; It is of

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a certain young woman, who was reckoned very devout in whose belly was often heard the croaking of frogs, and that she was likewise frequently delivered of these creatures. He adds that she managed the affair with so much cunning and dexterity, that not only the Physicians and Divines of that town, but also the physicians of several other towns, as well catholicks as protestants who were called upon on that occasion, and who were present when she acted this farce, and searched into the matter with all the eyes and judgement they had, could not discover the fraud, so that the thing had passed for an undoubted truth, had not the young woman happened to fall sick, and being seized with a qualm of conscience, confessed the trick, and discovered how she bit the doctors; and being rich, she declared, she did it with no other view but for the fame of being talked of, not only over that country, but over all the world, and of having her name remembered to Posterity.— However we may gather from this, that all doctors are not conjurers.

The same author also tells us upon the authority of another writer, whom he calls Savonarola, that it sometimes happens, that the women in the western & southern regions, and women who abound in bad blood, occasioned by ill diet, shall, besides a natural birth, sometimes bring forth a fleshy substance (his term is prustum carneum) alive, exactly in the shape of some animal, and that the women call it a wild beast, or monster, (quod dominæ ferram appellant) and that in certain parts of Apulia, it is very common, for women who bring forth a child, to be delivered at the same time, of a living thing resembling either an owl, a mole, and sometimes like a hawk or an eagle; and that it is a received notion, amongst them, that if the fœtus thus produced represents a hawk, or an eagle or any creature which is counted noble, the woman must have had some communication with a man of high dignity and noble extraction. On the contrary, if it proves some contemptible animal, such as an owl &c they are apt to censure her for having had a familiarity with some base fellow

as a clown, a footman, or the like, so that these fe-a are apt to discover intrigues if the women in that country are given to gallanties.

It is an old opinion, that the dutch and german women frequently have all the signs of breeding and prig nancy, and go (as the women call it) a year and a half, or, perhaps, two years, and, at last, be delivered of some ill shaped beast, which they have the grace to destroy as soon as it comes into the world, as being a shamed of it, whose father, the physicians say, is a charcoal stow; this made our poet Hudibras say,

That Knaves and fools are near a kin
as Dutchmen are t'a Sooterkin.

But, now we are talking of strange things, I cant help mentioning another odd appearance in nature, tho' of a different kind from any before mentioned, which is reported by Jacobus Horstius, another German physician; he tells us of one Christopher Muller, a coventry boy of Silesia, the son of John Muller, a carpenter; who shedding his teeth in the seventh year of his age, as it is usual with other children, it was found that on his left jaw the under side, there sprung up a golden tooth; it was the last tooth in his head but one, being very solid & bright, the rest of his teeth were white like other children, and he had them all, except one, which should have stood next to this golden one; as if God and nature (says our author) had ordered it so, that this golden tooth might appear the more conspicuous. He adds that he saw this boy, chew with it, he washed it, tryed it with a touchstone, and found it to be pure gold; & in fine, writes a hundred and fifty pages in the description and remarks upon this tooth, and answers the objections of those who disputed the veracity of it, which I shall not trouble the reader with, least I should set them all asleep, which might prove of dangerous consequence, now at the beginning of a war, when the enemy might catch us napping.

He seems to magnify this prodigy by saying that

no other country can boast of the like; and indeed I must confess, I cannot prove that we can produce a person now living with a golden tooth; but this I will venture to say for the honour of England that we can shew some hundreds of gentlemen who will bite at gold, and swallow down any thing that is backed to it, which perhaps will not be found in every country.

The same author relates a strange story of a girl who had the gift of turning every thing she touched to silver, which the readers may believe if they please; but takes no notice whether this gift descended to her posterity, or; indeed, whether she left any issue. I should be glad to know whether any of her posterity have been ministers of state, I cannot recollect one whom I should suspect to be descended from her, except Monsieur Colbert, who indeed turned every thing into silver, both for the king and his people, but did not employ the gift much for himself. The great men of some other countries, in all probability, might have had chymists for their ancestors, a people who have a peculiar art of turning gold and silver into smoak.